

# ***Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area Master Plan***

**Public Meeting #1**

**June 24, 2002**



**SPUR CROSS RANCH**  
Conservation Area Master Plan



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# Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area Master Plan

## Vision Statement

To protect and enhance the conservation area's archaeological, historical, and natural resources, including the integrity of its ecological processes while providing opportunities for public day-use recreation and education.

## Conservation Area Definition

A Conservation Area managed by Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department will be managed in a manner that maximizes those natural features and ecological processes indigenous to the area or for which the area was protected. Human uses of a Conservation Area will be typically non-consumptive and of short duration. With effective management, the biotic diversity and ecological complexity of the Conservation Area should be expected to increase over time.



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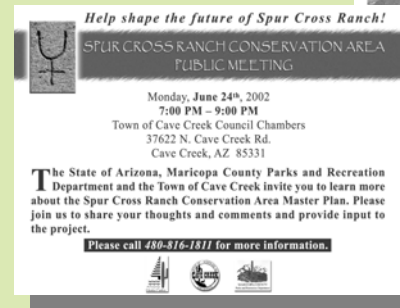
# Public Involvement

## Goals

- Develop and implement an interactive, cooperative approach
- Listen to your beliefs, issues, and concerns
- Provide effective and continuous communication

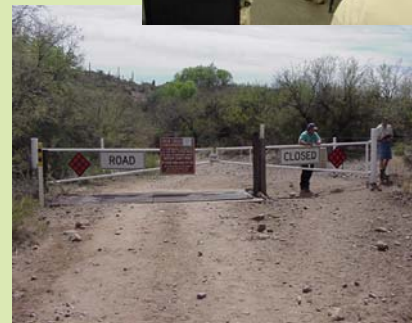
## Techniques

- Three more public meetings by December 2003
- Project newsletters
- Project web site
  - ♦ ([www.maricopa.gov/parks/spur\\_cross](http://www.maricopa.gov/parks/spur_cross))
- Town of Cave Creek newsletter
- Press releases and news articles
- Information line: 480-816-1811



## Issues - What We Have Heard

- Interim management of SCRCRA
- Long-term management of SCRCRA
  - ♦ Partnerships with other agencies, groups, and organizations
  - ♦ Cooperation from all interested groups
  - ♦ Plan the area recognizing SCRCRA is part of a larger ecosystem
  - ♦ Address adjacent land owner's concerns related to access
- Protecting the environmental resources
  - ♦ Archaeological preservation is key
- The future of Spur Cross Trail
  - ♦ Access to the Tonto National Forest



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# Public Involvement

## Issues - What We Have Heard (Continued)

- Current and future concessionaires
  - ♦ Area is restricted to a "select few"
  - ♦ Concerned about the impact of jeep tours and other uses
- Use SCRCA as an opportunity for education
  - ♦ Designate certain areas that can be visited
  - ♦ Cave Creek Museum should be part of the educational component
- Recreational uses (e.g., equestrian, hiking, mountain biking, bird watching, jeep tours, hunting, etc.)
  - ♦ Hunting should not be allowed
- Site User Access
  - ♦ Parking (accommodation for equestrian trailers)
  - ♦ Vehicles on-site should be limited
  - ♦ Explore alternative modes of transportation to move people from the parking to the Forest Service trailheads
  - ♦ Provide for access for the physically challenged
- Provide hiking trails for horses and pedestrians
  - ♦ Ensure connections SCRCA to other regional systems (e.g., Cave Creek Recreation Area, Maricopa County Trails System, and Tonto National Forest)
  - ♦ Ensure connection to local trails
- Find the balance between preservation and recreational use
  - ♦ Eco-tourism may be an opportunity for Cave Creek
- Recognize that various parts of the SCRCA adapt differently to fire



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# Cultural Resources

- Cultural resources are structures, properties, objects, landscapes, and sacred places from the past that constitute both our national and local heritage, including historic features or buildings and archaeological artifacts.



## Why are cultural resources important to the SCRCA Master Plan?

- A diverse array of cultural resources exist within SCRCA.
- These sites are fragile, and must be managed for conservation purposes.
- Native American Tribes hold the cultural resources at SCRCA in the highest regard.



## What makes cultural resources unique at SCRCA?

- An interpretive program is a priority to preserve the history of SCRCA.
- The density of prehistoric communities is high.
- Many sites are preserved in their natural, or undisturbed environment.
- SCRCA is publicly owned.
- SCRCA is located close to the Phoenix Metro area, and makes it ideal for convenient day trips.



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# Biological Resources

## Why are biological resources important to the SCRCA Master Plan?

- SCRCA has seen limited modifications over time, thus preserving much of its biological diversity.
- Biological systems can be easily disrupted and are difficult to re-establish (e.g., management of exotic/invasive species, fire.)
- Cave Creek Wash may be the only perennially flowing stream in Maricopa County. This is a highly unusual feature in the desert and is a resource to be studied and managed carefully.



## What makes biological resources unique at SCRCA?

- The combination of rugged hillsides, Upland Sonoran plant community and a healthy riparian community provides a wonderful mix of fauna and flora environments for visitors to enjoy.
- SCRCA can prove to be an effective draw for eco-tourists to experience both Upper Sonoran and Riparian habitats.
- The presence of some damaged ecosystems on the site provides an opportunity to teach the public about land and wildlife management.
- SCRCA can be developed into an outdoor classroom experience.



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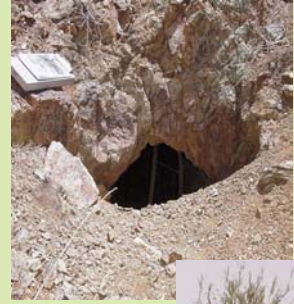


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# Geology

## Why is geology important to the SCRCA Master Plan?

- The presence of the Maricopa and Phoenix Mines offer the opportunity for interpretation of geological and historical resources.
- There are likely chemical and physical hazards that must be considered when planning access to the facilities.
- Controlling public access to the Maricopa Mine is a priority due to the presence of physical hazards.



## What makes the geology of the mine sites unique to SCRCA?

- Remnants of a historical mine site can be preserved.
- SCRCA contains an example of historical mining activity usually inaccessible or unavailable.
- The site is preserved in its biological, geological, and historical setting.
- The proximity of the SCRCA to a large metropolitan area (Phoenix) makes it ideally suited for day trips.



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# Water Resources

## Why are water resources important to the SCRCA Master Plan?

- Ground water is the source of perennial flow in Cave Creek; therefore, preservation of the existing ground water flow to the creek is key to preserving the creek ecosystem.
- Without a perennial source of water, cottonwood/willow forests would be severely degraded or replaced by Saltcedar.
- Loss of the riparian forest and source of water would degrade the upland wildlife and songbird habitat.
- Without perennial flow, the diversity and abundance of fish and other aquatic life would be limited.
- Ephemeral ponds in the creek help to detain and deliver water to the upland vegetation and wildlife.
- Contamination of the ground (animal wastes) or surface (tailings) water at SCRCA could also degrade aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems.



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# Water Resources

## What is unique about water resources to SCRCA?

- Upwelling of ground water sufficient to sustain perennial water is rare in the Upper Sonoran desert of Central Arizona.
- Degradation of riparian plant communities by poorly managed grazing is common in the West.
- Over-pumping of ground water in response to land development is common in the Phoenix region.
- Contamination of shallow ground water with salts, nitrates, and pesticides is also common in central and southern Arizona.
- A history of relatively good stewardship and public ownership has created a unique water resource at SCRCA.
- Further, long-term climatic trends (Pacific interdecadal oscillation, global climate change) suggests that desert riparian ecosystems, particularly cottonwood/willow forests are imperiled and may become even more unique.



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# Land Use

## Why is land use important to the SCRCA Master Plan?

- The rapid population growth in Arizona is causing an increase in the encroachment of urban land uses surrounding SCRCA.
- This is likely to alter the natural resources of SCRCA and the natural integrity of open spaces.
- Preserving natural areas within SCRCA will ensure that the scenic integrity remains unchanged.
- Consideration of trails and their relationship to environmental resources will be critical to designing them.
- Unauthorized access to SCRCA may present management challenges.
- Increased recreational demands may impact SCRCA and the Maricopa County Trails Master Plan.
- Land Use plans for SCRCA and the Tonto National Forest affect each other.
- Through an awareness of future population and development growth, objectives can be developed to manage for the preservation of natural resources in relation to the projected growth.



## What makes land use unique to SCRCA?

- The conservation easement and the Tonto National Forest will limit urban encroachment.
- Opportunities for several agencies to participate in land use management activities.



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# Fire

## Why is fire management important to consider related to the SCRCA Master Plan?

- Permitted use areas (e.g., trails) lend themselves to managing for and adapting to fire occurrences.
- Areas of high use may increase fire frequency.
- It is important to develop partnerships with the Tonto National Forest, Rural Metro Fire Departments, and local citizens in an effort to manage for and initial attack fires.
- As the wildland/urban interface continues to encroach SCRCA it is important to inform the public about fire danger.



## Why is fire unique to SCRCA?

- Fire has historically been part of ecological processes in higher elevation forests in the Southwest, and can be devastating within the upper Sonoran ecosystem present at SCRCA.
- A fire at SCRCA, depending on atmospheric conditions, could result in catastrophic ecologically long-term damage in a short period of time.
- SCRCA is uniquely situated between an encroaching dense metropolitan area (i.e., Phoenix) and a heavily fueled area (i.e, Tonto National Forest) subjecting itself to increased fire frequencies from the south or adjacent intense wildfires from the north.



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# Visual Resources

## Why are visual resources important to the SCRCA Master Plan?

- Currently, SCRCA'S landscapes are virtually undisturbed by human activities.
- Due to increased population within Arizona, areas like SCRCA are becoming more rare and popular.
- It is important to maintain the scenic integrity and cultural identity of the surrounding areas.
- Careful consideration of the siting of trails, visitors' center, museum and other facilities must be done in consideration of their visibility and sensitivity to the landscape.



## What makes visual resources unique to SCRCA?

- The majority of the landscape, including cultural sites, is virtually undisturbed from its natural condition and retains exceptionally high scenic integrity, resembling primarily ecological changes.
- The density and diversity of vegetation, especially along the north slope of Elephant Mountain and along parts of Cave Creek, are unparalleled.
- The diverse vegetative community attracts numerous species of birds and other wildlife, creating exceptional wildlife viewing opportunities.
- The visual beauty will be accessible to users through diverse recreational opportunities offered.



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# Acoustic Resources

## What makes sound unique at SCRCA?

- SCRCA is currently a relatively quiet environment. The main source of sounds are birds vocalizing and water running in Cave Creek Wash.
- Overhead planes and jeep tours contribute to the noise factor at SCRCA.
- SCRCA provides a place for people to enjoy the sounds of nature. It is appealing to many people because it is within a short drive from Phoenix.



## Why is sound important to the SCRCA Master Plan?

- Preserving a natural environment is important so that future generations can continue to enjoy and experience the undisturbed environment and sounds with limited human influence.
- Some wildlife species are sensitive to noise.



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